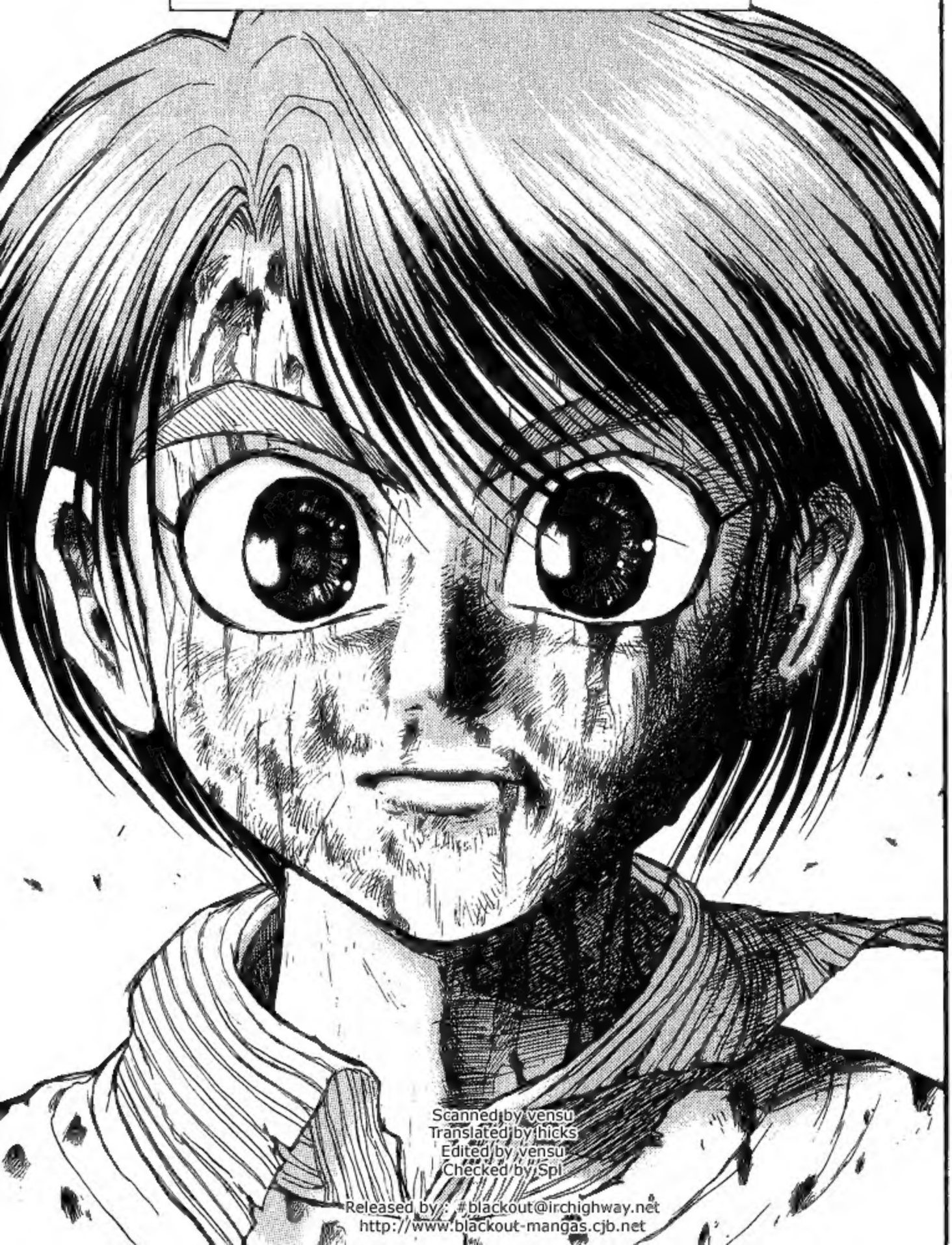
ACT 1: MASARU

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE :

"THE FIVE FLOORS PAGODA"



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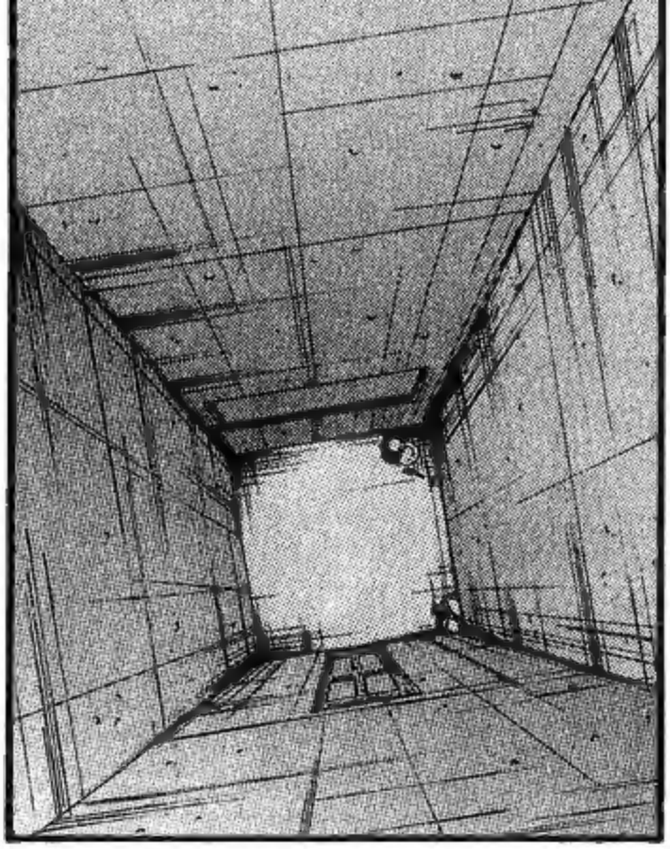
BLONG

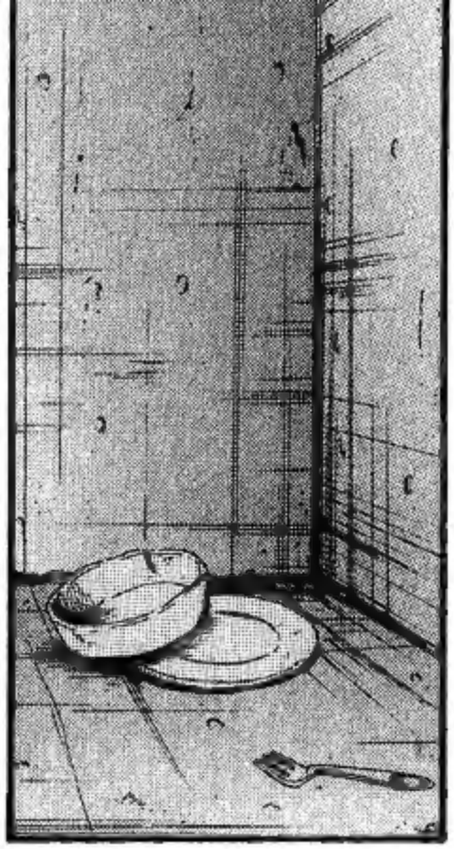
HEY! WHAT'S GOING ON? THE ELEVATOR SUDDENLY STOPPED!
IT'S NOT NORMAL !
CLAC

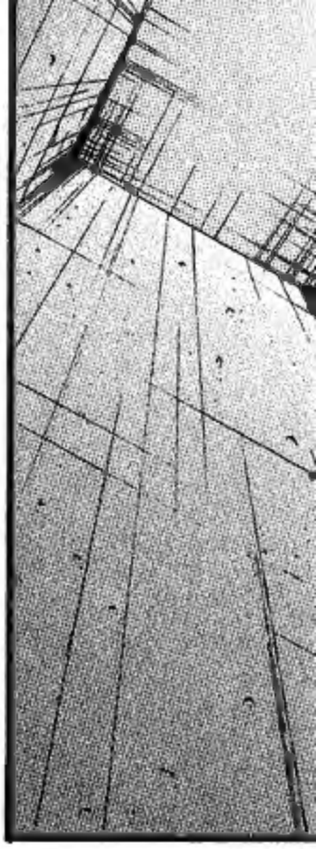
2

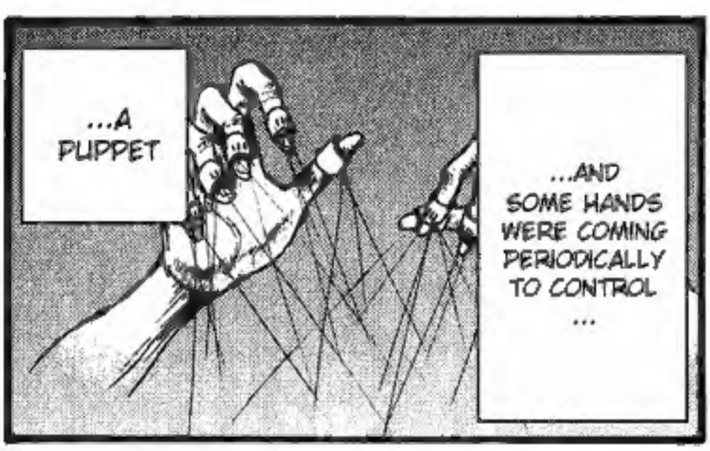
CALM DOWN! SOMETHING MIGHT HAVE HAPPENED UPSTAIRS! SAFETY LIGHTS WON'T TOOK LONG BEFORE SWITCHING ON!
THE LIGHT'S OFF, MR. YAMANAKA !

WE'RE DEFINITELY NOT LUCKY ...
IS THERE SOMEONE ?!
AND THEORITICALLY, WE'LL BE ABLE TO LEAVE ONLY WHEN THESE TWO ARE THROWN FROM THE TOP OF THE PAGODA!
I REMIND YOU THAT A BOMB IS ABOUT TO EXPLODE !
WE CAN'T WAIT !
BOM
BOM
GHH
HH
SHIROGANE ... WHAT'S HAPPENING ?!
BRR
IT'S NOT A REASON TO GET EXCITED LIKE THAT!
HEY!
M?
MEMORIES ARE COMING BACK TO ME ...
HUH?
I...
I'VE BEEN LOCKED UP IN THE DARK, IN A ROOM NOT BIGGER THAN THIS ONE HERE, WHEN I WAS LITTLE...
GHH
FHH
HH
FHH
3
BRR
FHH
HAA

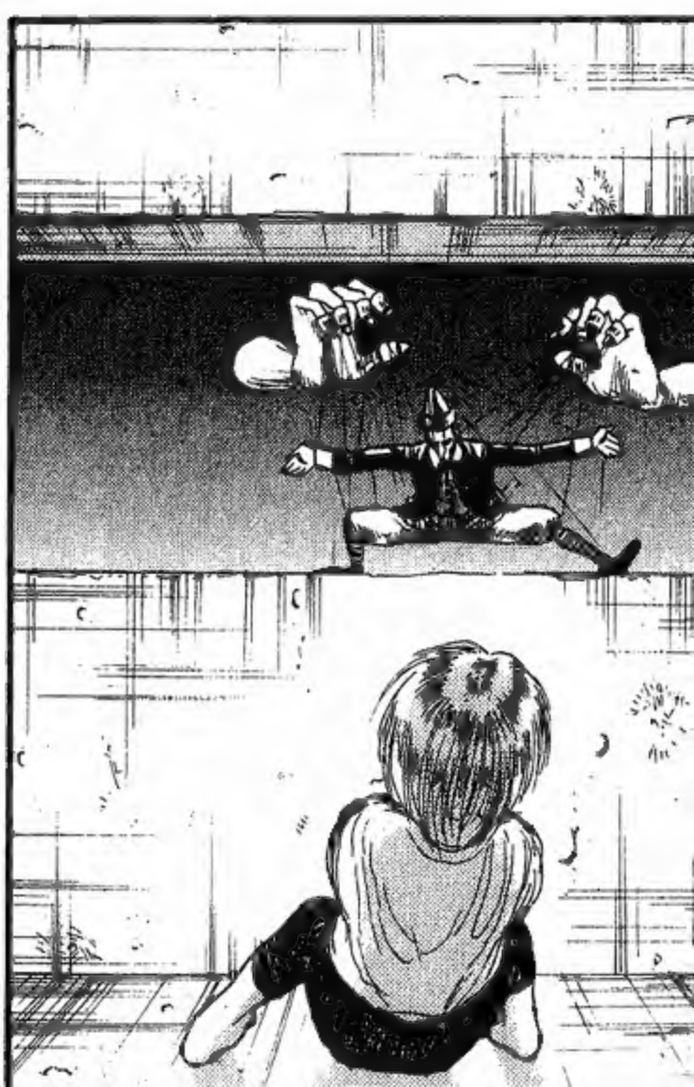




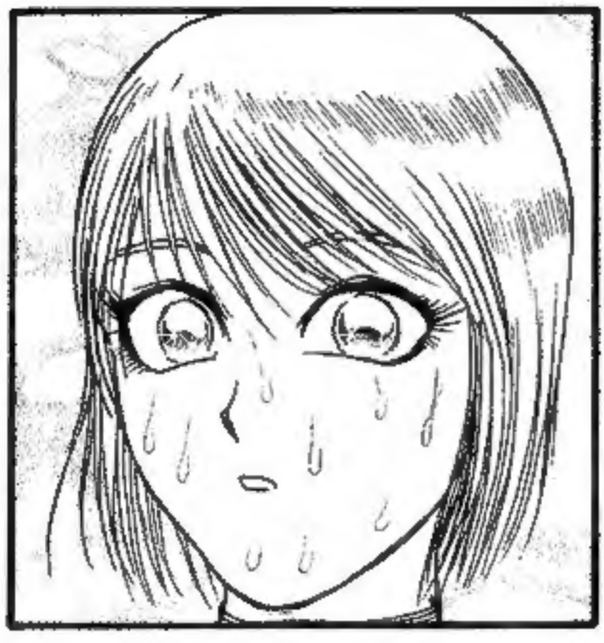


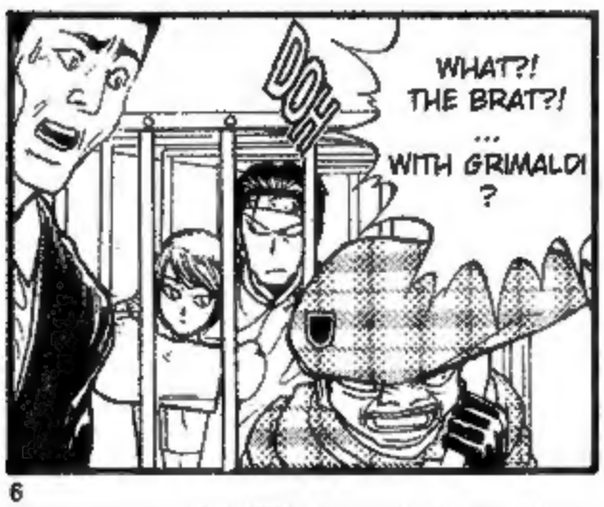

...A PUPPET
...AND SOME HANDS WERE COMING PERIODICALLY TO CONTROL ...

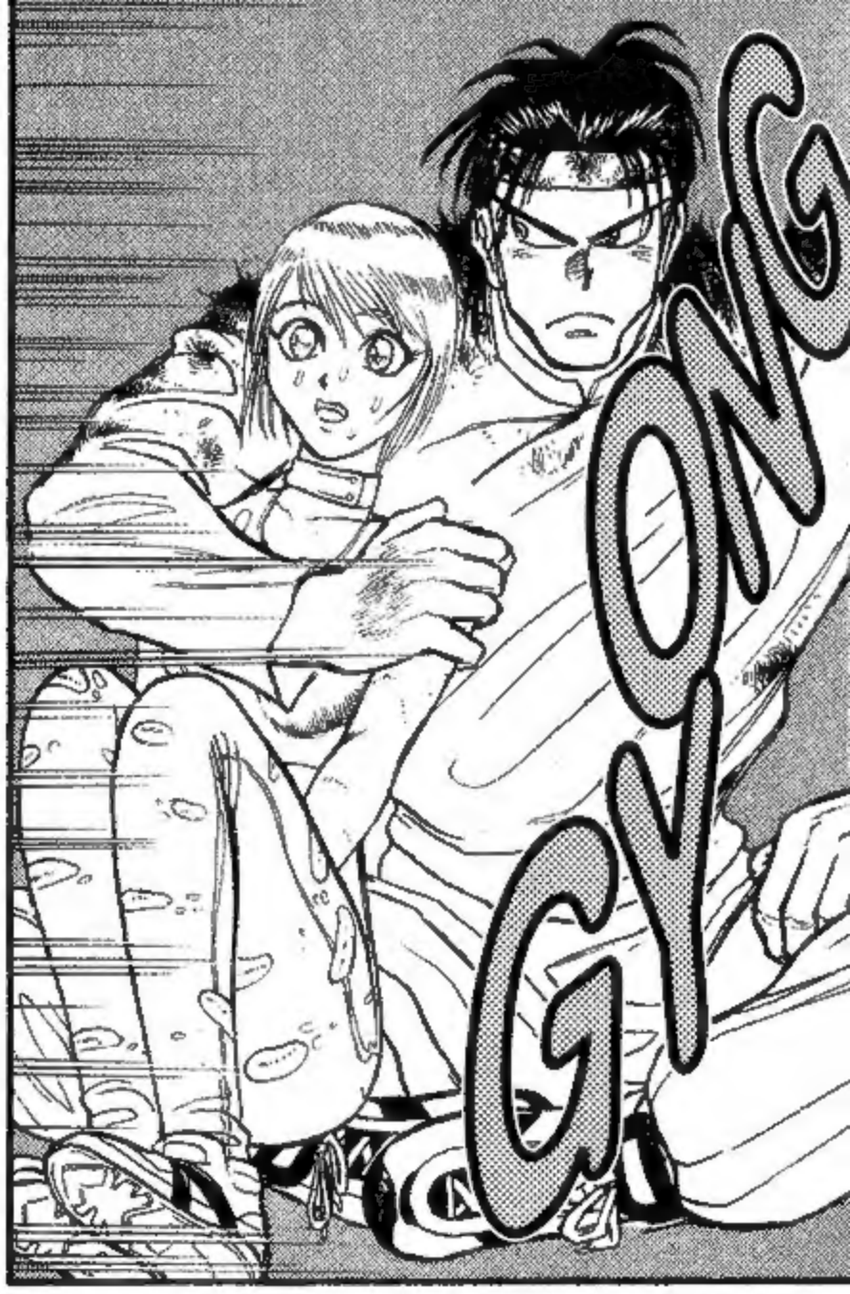
... THERE WAS A LITTLE OPENING ...
IN THIS ROOM ...



I'M AFRAID ...
WHEN I'M IN THIS SAME SORT OF PLACE !
... I'M VERY AFRAID !
GNN
EVEN WHEN I'VE BEEN TAKEN OUT OF THIS ROOM, TO ALSO TEACH ME HOW TO CONTROL PUPPETS ...
VERY OFTEN, I IMAGINED IN A HALF-DREAM, A LITTLE OPENING ...
... THIS FEAR REMAINED DEEP WITHIN ME ...
AND WRINKLED AND DRY HANDS ...
... WHICH WERE CONTROLLING MY OWN BODY !




DOH
WHAT?! THE BRAT?! ... WITH GRIMALDI ?

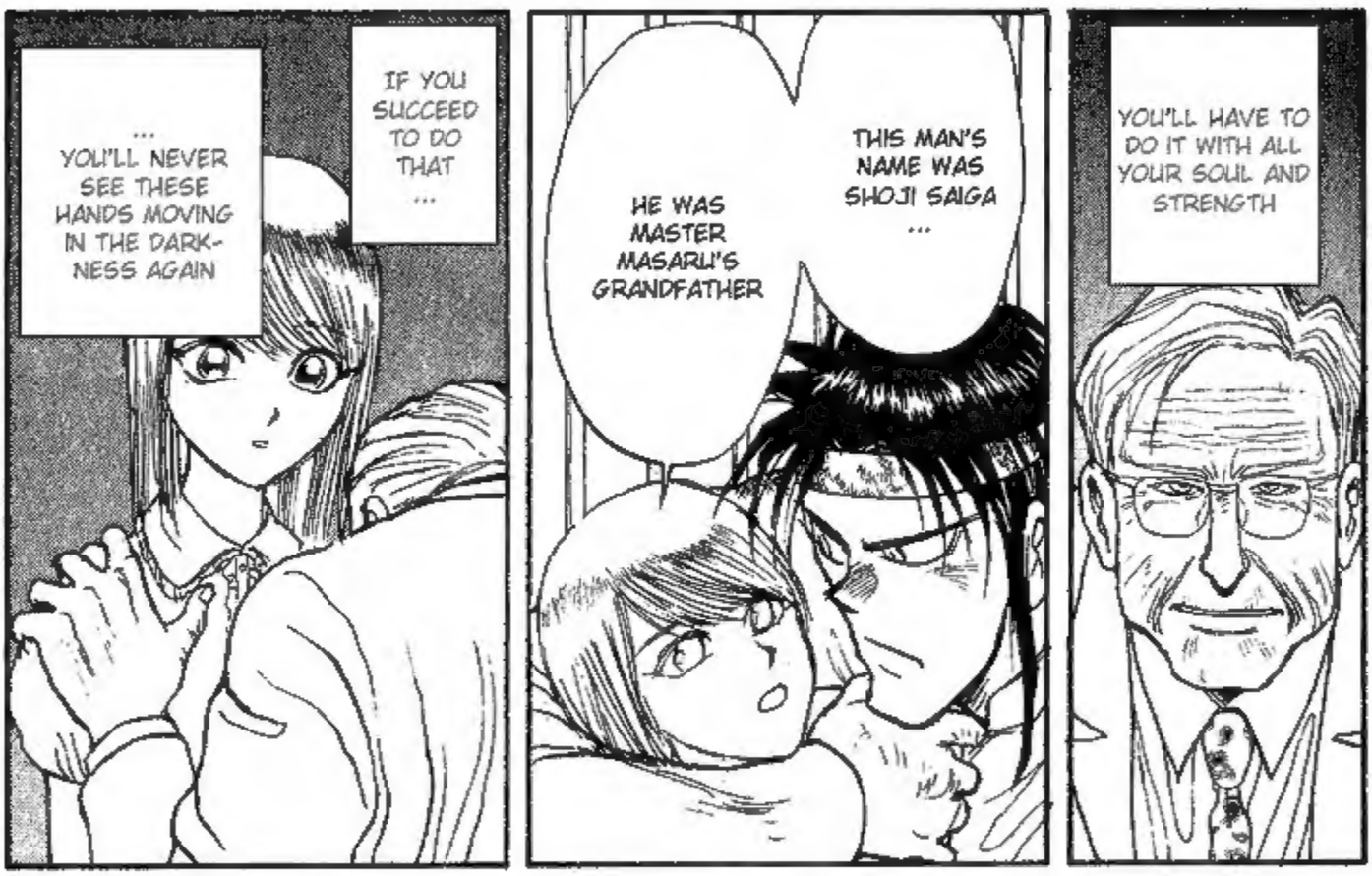

GONG
GY

...THAT WHEN YOU SMILE WITH CONVICTION, POSITIVELY, ANY FEAR FLIES AWAY !
MY UNCLE ALWAYS SAID ...

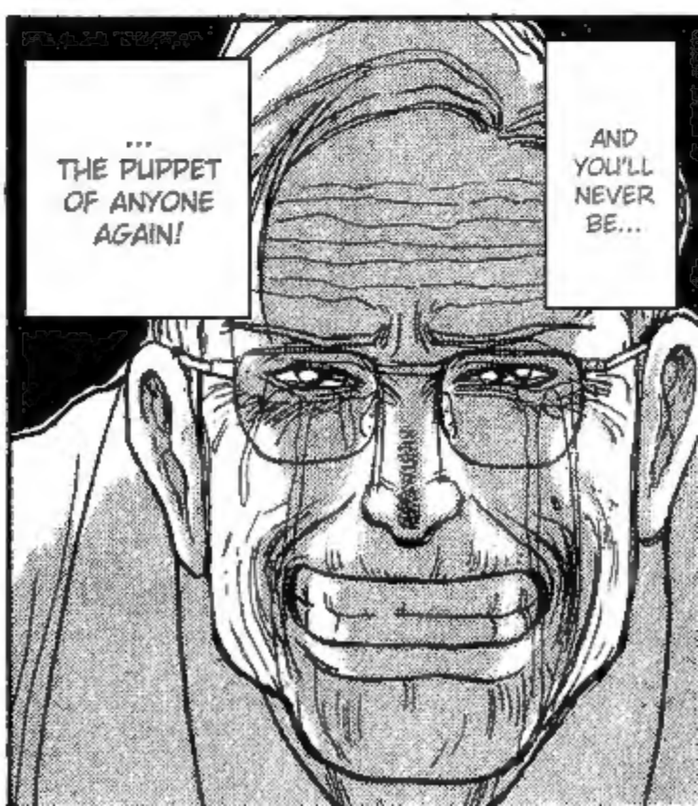
RAISE THE CORNERS OF YOUR MOUTH AND SMILE!
SMILE, SHIROGANE ...

BELIEVE ME, IF YOU SMILE, ALL YOUR SADNESS WILL DISAPPEAR !
... SHIROGANE
MAKE ME A PRETTY SMILE ...
HOWEVER
... WHICH EVEN FORGOT THAT SHE WAS ALLOWED TO LAUGH
SHIROGANE, COME ON... YOU'RE LIKE A SAD LITTLE PUPPET ...
7
YOU TOLD ME, EXCEPT FOR A FEW THINGS, WHAT SOMEONE TOLD ME A LONG TIME AGO ...
WHAT IS IT? I GOT SOMETHING ON MY FACE ?
YOU'LL EVEN BECOME A YOUNG GIRL ABLE TO ROAR WITH LAUGHTER!
ONE DAY, I KNOW THAT YOU'LL FIND THE DESIRE TO SMILE AGAIN ...

IF YOU WANT TO GET BACK YOUR LOST HUMANITY ...
... YOU'LL HAVE TO PROTECT A YOUNG BOY NAMED MASARU ... DO YOU UNDERSTAND?


YOU'LL HAVE TO DO IT WITH ALL YOUR SOUL AND STRENGTH
THIS MAN'S NAME WAS SHOJI SAIGA ...
HE WAS MASTER MASARU'S GRANDFATHER
IF YOU SUCCEED TO DO THAT ...
... YOU'LL NEVER SEE THESE HANDS MOVING IN THE DARKNESS AGAIN

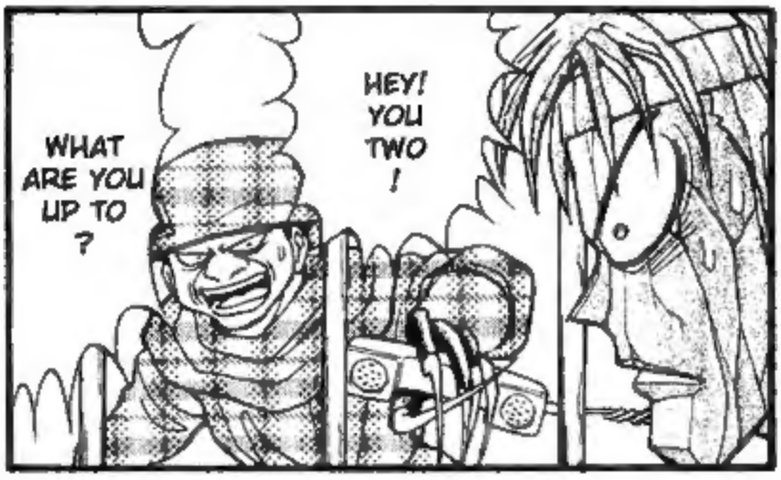
THAT'S WHY YOU PROTECT MASARU ?
BUT YOU SAID THAT YOU AND YOUR MOTHER HAD BEEN HELPED BY THIS MAN !
I'M SORRY ... BUT, I LIED


AND YOU'LL NEVER BE...
... THE PUPPET OF ANYONE AGAIN!

OH, FORGIVE ME! I DIDN'T INTEND TO ...
IT'S OK!
YOUR ARM ...
WHAT ?
IT'S STRANGE ...
BECAUSE, UNTIL THEN, I WAS ALWAYS TOLD THAT MY ONLY TASK WOULD BE TO DESTROY PUPPETS, AND THAT I HAD TO BECOME A PUPPET MYSELF FOR THIS...
BUT MR. SHOJI ASKED ME THE CONTRARY. I HAD TO BECOME "HUMAN" AGAIN ...
... I ALMOST TREMBLED WITH JOY
WHEN MR. SHOJI ASKED ME TO PROTECT MASTER MASARU...
IF I SUCCEEDED TO PROTECT, IN JAPAN, A BOY NAMED MASARU ...
AND... WHAT I JUST FOUND STRANGE ...
YES?
... I'D NEVER SEE THOSE HORRIBLE HANDS IN THE DARK
THAT MADE ME VERY HAPPY ...
... IN ORDER TO PROTECT SOMEONE !
BUT I NEVER FORGOT WHAT MR. SHOJI SAID...
I TRAVELLED IN MANY COUNTRIES, TO DESTROY PUPPETS

... THAN WHAT MR. SHOJI SAID, AND THIS WONDERFUL THING... IT'S THE WARMTH ...
... IT'S THAT THERE'S SOMETHING EVEN WARMER ...
... AND THE GENEROSITY THAT EMANATES FROM YOUR ARM!

HUH ?!
BLANG


HEY! YOU TWO !
WHAT ARE YOU UP TO ?

SBAHH

BLAM
YOUNG MASTER !
MASARU !!
...NARUMI!
...SHIROGANE !
BLAM
BA-D-BAM

IT'S BECAUSE OF ME THAT YOU LIVED ALL THESE HORRIBLE THINGS !!
I'M SORRY ...

...I FOUND YOU !
AT LAST ...

12

GO DOWN FROM THERE, BRAT !
AAH

WHAT ARE YOU SAYING, MASARU ?! LOOK AT ALL YOUR WOUNDS! IT'S ME WHO SHOULD BE ASHAMED TO SEE YOU LIKE THAT!
... NO !

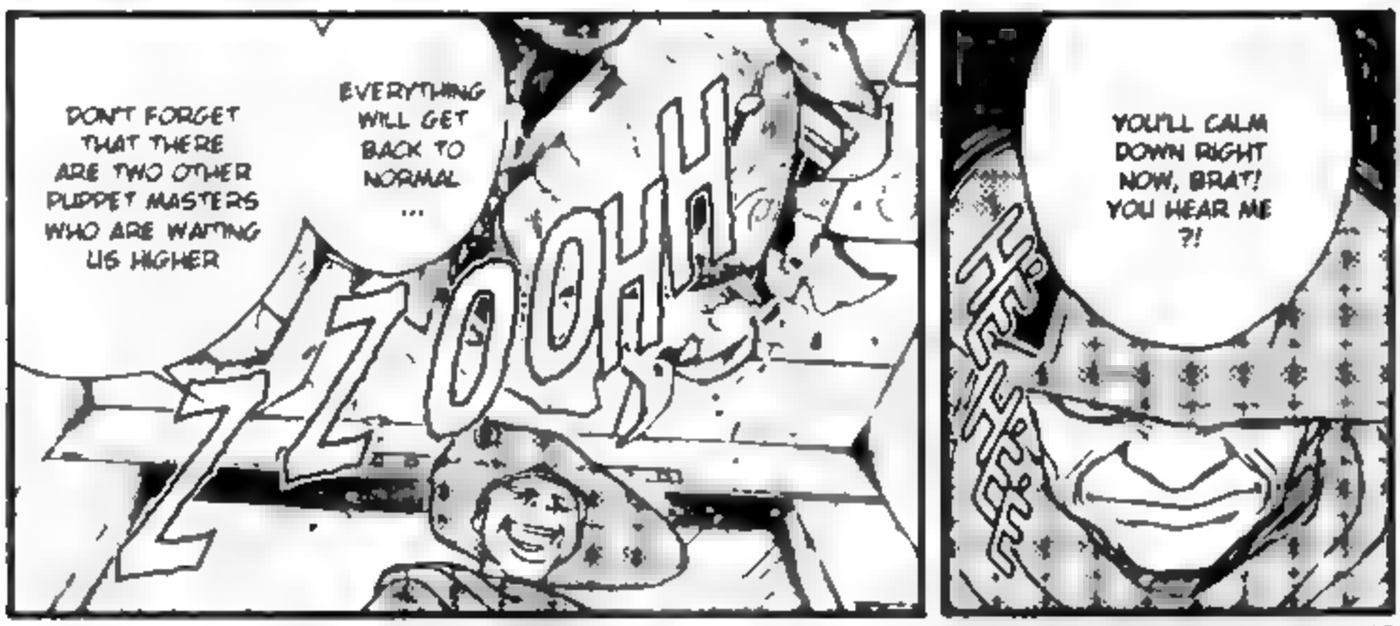
DON'T WORRY, SHIROGANE ...
MASTER! WHAT HAVE THEY DONE TO YOU ?!

BAM
BAM
MASARU !!
... IT'S THE END OF THE FUN !
I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU ARRIVED HERE, BUT ...
IT'S THE SAME FOR US... WE'RE NOT LAUGHING ANYMORE!
OUCH !!
GAH!
13
OR ELSE YOU'LL HAVE TO DEAL WITH ME
ASHIHANA, BASTARD! GET AWAY FROM MASARU!
MR. ASHIHANA !
RIGHT, BRAT ?
AH?
OH NO, EVERY-THING'S FINE!

BOOM
... I GOT THE FEELING THAT I CAN'T MOVE ANYMORE!
BUT... I'M GETTING A LITTLE TIRED, BRAT ...
...
HE HE. . HE PROMISED ME ONE BILLION YEN!
HE'S WITH US!
HE'S AT MY SERVICE! I'M PAYING HIM TO HELP US!
VLOM
... TOTALLY SOMEONE ELSE!
WHAT A SURPRISE TO SEE YOU AGAIN LIKE THAT! WHAT'S HAPPENED OVER THERE? IT SEEMS THAT YOU'VE BECOME ...
HE LOST CONSCIOUS-NESS...
...MR. ASHIHANA !
BOLOM

YOUNG MASTER !
GNN!
BZ ZANG
... MM ... DO YOU THINK SO ?

BUT . IT'S THE END OF ALL THIS!
YOU SURPRISED ME TOO!


DON'T FORGET THAT THERE ARE TWO OTHER PUPPET MASTERS WHO ARE WAITING US HIGHER
EVERYTHING WILL GET BACK TO NORMAL ...
ZZ OOH
YOU'LL CALM DOWN RIGHT NOW, BRAT! YOU HEAR ME ?!
HHH

ZONG
... NOOOO !
ZONG

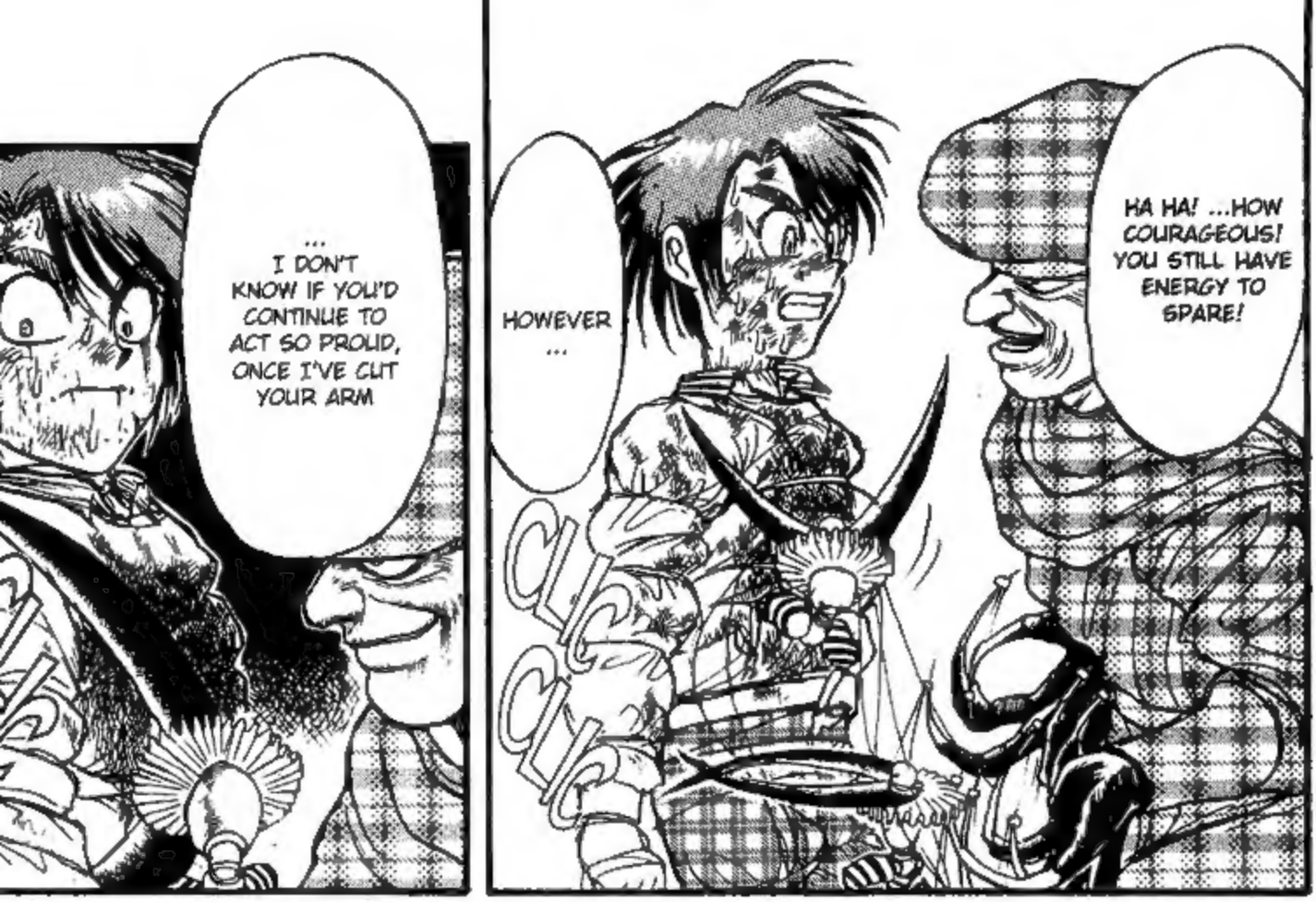
NE ... VER !

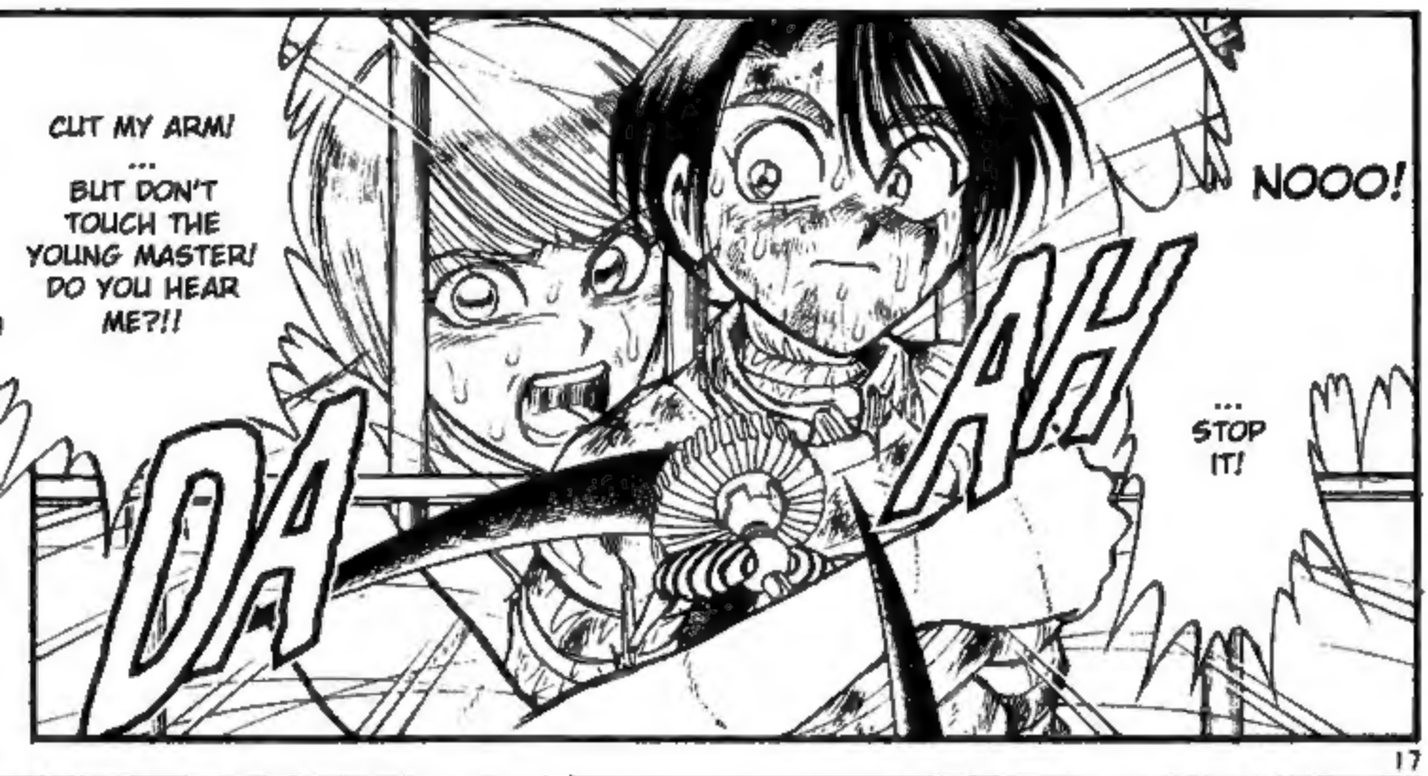
NOW, YOU'LL BE ABLE TO LOOK AT YOUR TWO FRIENDS FALLING FROM THE PAGODA'S TOP!
SSH

AND BY MY FAULT
...
THEY'VE BEEN INJURED
NARUMI AND SHIROGANE
CAME TO SAVE ME
YOUNG MASTER !

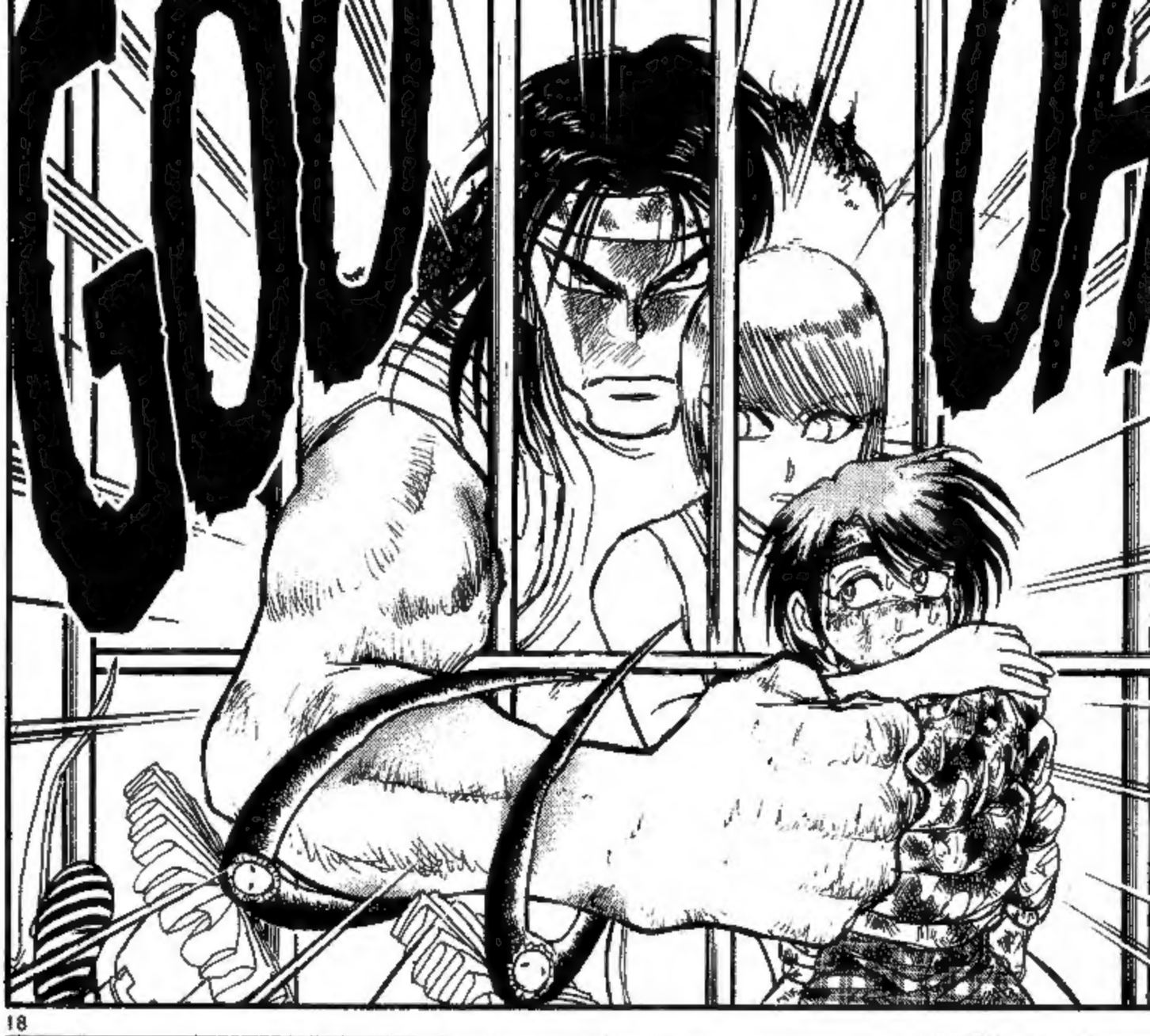
... YES !
SIGH
YOU THINK YOU CAN HELP THEM ?!
HI HI HI
...
SO WHAT, BRAT?!

STOP, MASARU !!
YOUNG MASTER ... NO!
THIS TIME ...
IT'S ME WHO'LL SAVE THEM !
SCH


HA HA! ...HOW COURAGEOUS! YOU STILL HAVE ENERGY TO SPARE!
HOWEVER ...
CLIC CLIC
... I DON'T KNOW IF YOU'D CONTINUE TO ACT SO PROUD, ONCE I'VE CUT YOUR ARM


NOOO!
AH
OH
CUT MY ARM! ... BUT DON'T TOUCH THE YOUNG MASTER! DO YOU HEAR ME?!!
... STOP IT!

SHIRO-GANE ...
HE HE ... YOU GOT A VERY DEVOTED BODYGUARD, BRAT...
CLC
THEN I'LL CUT YOUR TWO ARMS AT THE SAME TIME !


GOU
UP

SBLING

MY DUCK DUMMY AREN'T ABLE TO ...
WHAA AAT?!
CLIC CLIC

WOOF
... MY BOY
YOU CAN REST ...
YOU BECAME STRONG MASARU ... BRAVO
... SHIROGANE AND ME ...
OH OH
FROM NOW ON ...
WE'LL TAKE CARE OF EVERYTHING !!
OH OH

KRRRAA!
... WITH ONLY HIS ARM'S STRENGTH!
IMPOSSIBLE! HE BENDS THE BARS ...
GOOK

B3 B2 B1 1 2 3 4 5 V
DING

20

SPA
AF